CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Soviet Ukraine During World War II

In the preceding chapters we have briefly traced the efforts of the Ukrainians to profit by the clash between the two totalitarian powers of Germany and the USSR and the Ukrainian hopes of being recognized as an independent state. These hopes had been thwarted by the Nazi refusal to treat the Ukraine as anything except a field for German expansion and the Western refusal to recognize the Ukrainian struggle for independence.

This, of course, does not tell the entire story. From the earliest days of the Soviet occupation of Western Ukraine, many of the leading Ukrainian patriots, writers, artists and scholars, including a large part of the staff of the Shevchenko Scientific Society in Lviv, had seized the opportunity to retire to the west into the Polish Government General but there were many more who were picked up in the early deportations and deposited along with the Poles in Central Asia. Some of these, during the brief period of friendship between the Poles and the Soviets, were again able to make their way to the west along with General Anders and found themselves again at freedom, while those who had retired to the west were forced to undergo increasing persecution at the hands of the Nazis as these became more desperate.

On the other hand, when the break finally came in 1941 and the Ukrainians, including those mobilized in the Red Army, began to surrender in masses, the Soviets began to deport to the east all of the outstanding people on whom they could lay their hands and whom at the first moment they did not wish to exterminate. In this number there were such Ukrainian writers as Tychyna, Rylsky and others who had showed their loyalty to the regime by their tasteless flattery of the regime in Moscow.

722 In the same way, the authorities gathered up in frenzied haste machinery, finished products, and records and started them likewise to the east with the hope of setting them up somewhere in a safe place and using them to increase the Soviet war potential. All this was a hurried and confused process, for it was contradicted by the Soviet orders to reduce the Ukraine to a heap of ruins and to leave nothing available for the invaders.

[814] [661] The clash between these two ideas was vividly reflected in the destruction of Kiev. Some sections of the Academy of Sciences of the UkSSR were hurriedly packed on trains and moved to Ufa. Other sections for little better reasons were abandoned in the general confusion or were mined for immediate destruction. Priceless books and records, no less than boilers and lathes, shared the two fates, while Kiev, thoroughly mined, was exploded and set on fire without regard for the needs of the people. The Soviet authorities, well aware that they could not evacuate the entire population, destroyed the food supplies of those who were left behind while other detachments massacred the helpless population indiscriminately.

The situation at Kharkiv and Odesa was far better and far more logical for the Soviets had a few days longer to sort out what they wished to remove and what they wanted to destroy, but even in these places there was the same wanton destruction which conflicted with the avowed aims of the Soviet authorities.

Then ensued a series of mutual recriminations, and it is still not clear in regard to many buildings and institutions whether the bulk of the damage and the losses were caused by Nazi or by Communist actions. Some 3500 carloads of machinery were shipped alone from the city of Zaporyzhzhya and most of this material was packed at night in utter darkness with no special care as to where it was being sent.

[466] The same situation confronted the workers, some 5,000,000 of whom were evacuated from the Ukraine and landed in rough factories that were hastily erected somewhere in Asia. These sometimes lacked even roofs and means of heating when the mercury dropped to 45° below zero.

Under such conditions, if the chaos and the disorder were not to be allowed to spread further, it was obvious that something had to be done to improve the morale of the population. This was particularly evident and necessary during the early months when it seemed as if the Nazis might decide to make some concessions to the people. As a result, there were a series of developments undertaken which superficially, at least, offered some concessions to the spirit of the various non-Russian nationalities. 722

Thus, in 1943 the Academy of Sciences of the UkSSR was allowed to celebrate its twenty fifth anniversary at Ufa in the Bashkir Autonomous Republic and to list its institutes which were scattered throughout Asia. Such an event rendered it possible to blame the Nazis for the destruction of what had not been evacuated. It furnished good propaganda for the Western powers who were already sending copious supplies to the USSR and receiving in return from it only condemnation and criticism. [814]

In the same way, the various writers who had passed the approval of the government were assigned posts as newspaper correspondents in the Red Army where they could sing the praises of Stalin. Yet, at the same time, they were encouraged to write articles and poems which would reflect the hostility to the Nazis and again and again the censorship was relaxed for men like Sosyura to write poems in praise of the Ukraine, of its past, its present and its future. 722 538 626

Others like Yanovsky and Bazhan were allowed to emphasize the separation between the traditional Ukrainian speech and the jargon that had been put out in the various Ukrainian-Russian dictionaries after the breaking of the Ukrainian Renaissance. They were allowed to assemble collaborators to compile a more conservative dictionary and to revamp the system of orthography which had been the work of such pronounced Russian sympathizers as Khvylya during the preceding period. [192] [814]

Yet, these concessions were more apparent than real, for under the wartime conditions, those Ukrainian scholars that had the apparent confidence of the government were scattered far and wide. They were living perforce under abnormal conditions and 722 814

722 814 no efforts were made to bring them together or to conduct a revival of the Ukrainian work that had been so ruthlessly and needlessly shattered. It was a wartime device adopted for a passing situation and the masters in the Kremlin well understood that the fury of the war had done more than they had ever dreamed possible for the disintegration of the various Soviet Republics. Once, therefore, the evacuation had taken place, the Soviet leaders had only to sit by and to reap the profits. There would be plenty of time for that later and so the war years seemed an intermission in the relentless pressure that had been exerted in the past.

648 661 [167] It was for the Soviet leaders a far more vital problem to recover the masses of the people who had fled to the west or had been carried away by the Germans and who might, even in case of a victory of the democratic powers, reveal the full force of the Soviet pressure. That was why they welcomed the Yalta Agreement which provided for the compulsory return to the USSR of all refugees and deported persons and why, once peace was restored, they showed such devilish ingenuity in trying to recover the control of every one who could testify from personal experience as to the nature of the Soviet rule.

It was with the greatest surprise and lack of comprehension that the Western leaders became aware of this situation. They had listened eagerly to the Soviet siren songs that it was only Nazi sympathizers and criminals and traitors who did not want to return under the Soviet rule and it required some months before supposedly serious statesmen recovered their equilibrium sufficiently to understand the way in which they had been duped in the middle of the war.

Yet, no sooner had Soviet rule been reestablished than the old processes were revived with even greater energy and vigor. The last masks of independence or of free thought in the cultural or economic fields were torn away and the old persecution and charges were pressed with every increasing zeal.